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Examining the *Chaîne Opératoire* of the Late Cypriot II-III A (15th-12th centuries B.C.) Female Terracotta Figurines: An Experimental Approach

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Examining the *Chaîne Opératoire* of the Late Cypriot II-III A (15th-12th centuries B.C.) Female Terracotta Figurines: An Experimental Approach

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- 1 During the Cypriot Late Bronze Age and, more precisely, the 15th-12th centuries B.C., the anthropomorphic Base-Ring figurine tradition reached its height. Broadly speaking, the handmade terracottas of females can be stylistically separated into two groups comprising both hollow and solid examples: the so-called 'bird-headed' (Type A) and 'flat-headed' (Type B) figurines (ÅSTRÖM and ÅSTRÖM 1972, 512-514; J. KARAGEORGHIS 1977, 72-85; MORRIS 1985, 166-174; KARAGEORGHIS 1993, 3-14).
- 2 The *chaîne opératoire* of this group of figurines is one of the main areas of investigation undertaken by Constantina Alexandrou as part of her Anastasios G. Leventis funded PhD research at Trinity College Dublin. To this end, and in collaboration with Brendan O'Neill, an experimental methodology was established in order to draw out additional information relating to the manufacture of these figurines.

Fig. 1. Anthropomorphic figurine of the 'bird-headed' type holding an infant – Fig. 2. Anthropomorphic figurine of the 'flat-headed' type with hands on the abdomen.



<http://www.britishmuseum.org>

- 3 Few scholars have discussed the manufacture of these hollow figurines, preferring instead to interpret their character and role(s) through typological characterisation. However, understanding the *chaîne opératoire* of these figurines will shed light not only on the technical abilities of those who made them, but also on their social significance.
- 4 Engagement with both primary (examination of fragmentary figurines in museum collections) and secondary sources was central to the preliminary phase of examination into the technologies of production. Nevertheless, it quickly became necessary to include an experimental aspect in order to have a better assessment of the evidence obtained through these sources. In addition, questions relating to the timing, levels of expertise needed, difficulties in production, etc. could only be answered through such experimentation and replication.
- 5 Owing to time constraints, this project has focused on the manufacture procedures of Type-B hollow figurines because, while sharing many of the same features as found in Type-A, they also possess more complicated and detailed construction in their heads and faces.
- 6 Essentially, this experimental methodology compared secondary source commentaries relating to production against artifactual materials in order to target areas requiring additional data. A series of controlled experiments were then carefully designed and conducted in order to acquire this supplementary data. Subsequently, this data was utilized to refine the suggested production methods and sequences. The veracity of these proposals was then tested through a process of object replication, which were in turn

compared against the archaeological materials as yet another layer of verification and control.

- 7 This broad methodological approach was constructed specifically to effectively draw out additional data from a diverse range of sources. By using four independent points of reference (primary sources, secondary sources, experimentation, object replication), each data set can be corroborated from multiple perspectives, adding to the credibility of results.
 - 8 The aim of this research is to highlight the significance of the results deriving from the experimental work in interpreting the Late Cypriot social context, while also demonstrating the benefits for a structured methodological approach within experimental archaeology.
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